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THOMAS MESSINGER DROWN (1842–1904)

Fellow in Class I, Section 3, 1887.

In the death of Dr. Thomas Messinger Drown, late president of Lehigh University, both the educational and scientific interests of the country suffered a severe loss.

Dr. Drown was born in Philadelphia, March 19, 1842. He attended the schools of that city, graduating from its High School in 1859, from which he entered the medical department of the University of Pennsylvania, receiving the degree of doctor of medicine in 1862. As the interest aroused in him by the study of therapeutics or surgery during this period was less keen than that for chemical science, he devoted but a short time to medical practice, again becoming a student, this time of chemistry, at the Sheffield and Lawrence Scientific Schools, and also serving as assistant under Professor Gibbs at the latter institution. His study of chemistry and metallurgy was continued at the University of Heidelberg and at the School of Mines, at Freiberg, Saxony, where he had exceptional opportunities to meet some of the masters in these sciences and to learn their methods of teaching and investigation. Returning to America with a training in metallurgical chemistry of unusual excellence, he opened an office as analytical chemist in Philadelphia and maintained it for several years. In 1874, he became professor of chemistry in Lafayette College and retained that position until 1881. In 1873 he was elected to the secretaryship of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, of which he was a charter member, holding that office until 1883, and serving as its president in 1897–1898. In 1885 he accepted the professorship of analytical chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was soon after placed in charge of the chemical department. This position he resigned in 1895 to accept the presidency of Lehigh University, which he held at the time of his death. He also retained a connection with the Massachusetts State Board of Health, begun in 1887, as consulting chemist.

He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from Columbia University in 1895. He was elected Resident Fellow of the Academy in March 1887, and was an Associate Fellow at the time of his death, which occurred November 16, 1904, after a brief illness.

Dr. Drown will long be remembered as a successful and unusually inspiring teacher by the many students who came under his influence at Lafayette College and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His methods of teaching were broad, and looked toward high ideals, and while he furnished incentive for the man of quick intellect, he had a keen and generous sympathy for the slow worker.

His published papers afford abundant evidence of his industry, clear thought and critical judgment, as well as of his power to originate, plan and execute important investigations. His papers in the Transactions of the American Institute of Mining Engineers constitute a record of his efforts to improve the quality of analytical procedures in connection with metallurgical chemistry, both by contributions from his laboratory and through the development of a rational discussion of the subject. The series of papers which form a part of the Reports of the State Board of Health of Massachusetts record the results of the extensive work which has become both an inspiration and a model for the investigation of water supplies throughout the country, and also contain the records of other investigations undertaken in connection with the Board of Health. These alone constitute a worthy memorial.

His administration of the office of secretary of the Institute of Mining Engineers, and that of head of the Chemical Department of the Institute of Technology, and especially his success as president of Lehigh University, all attest his executive ability, and each will long reflect something of his clear judgment, broad thinking and systematic methods.

In Dr. Drown a gentle nature was combined with marked executive ability, and broad scholarly culture with scientific attainment. This was reflected in his administrative work, which he carried with a firm, but never with a rough hand. While generous and sympathetic, he was always just in his judgment of others, and this combined with an exceptional personal charm, and an unselfishness such as is seldom equaled, endeared him to pupils, colleagues and friends, who will remember him not only as one who won their regard, and often their affection, but also as one who equally compelled their esteem because of his attainments as an educator and as a scientist.

H. P. TALBOT.